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QUESTION OF THE REALIZATION IN ALL COUNTRIES OF THE ECONOMIC,
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS CONTAINED IN THE UNIVERSAL
DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND IN THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT
ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, AND STUDY OF SPECIAL
PROBLEMS WHICH THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES FACE IN THEIR EFFORTS
TO ACHIEVE THESE HUMAN RIGHTS

PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE RIGHT TO ENJOY AN ADEQUATE
STANDARD OF LIVING; THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

The present document contains the report of the Food and Agriculture
Organization of the United Nations submitted in accordance with Commission
on Human Rights resolution 1985/42.

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FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS

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Hunger and Starvation

Contribution by FAO

The problem

1. The present tragedies in Ethiopia and in other parts of Africa only show that, even 10 years after the World Food Conference of 1974, the world lacks an adequate world food security system. Food supplies remain vulnerable to the effects of droughts, floods and other disasters. Over nine million refugees crowd many developing nations, stretching meagre supplies even thinner. Meanwhile, chronic hunger and malnutrition persist even in years of good harvest.
2. Over 500 million people are undernourished because food production is inadequate, distribution unreliable and because, being poor, they lack the economic means to purchase or produce enough to eat.
3. These people, and the many more whose food supply is barely adequate or unstable, have difficulty breaking out of this situation on their own. The rural poor cannot purchase the inputs, such as fertilizer and seeds, they need to increase food and agricultural production. Many are landless, eking out a survival from occasional paid work.
4. On a wider level, the Governments of the countries most affected by hunger and rural poverty find themselves in a position similar to that of their people. The poorest countries depend mainly on their export earnings from agricultural commodities, the world prices for which have fallen in recent years. The little foreign exchange they earn is needed to service debt and to buy essential goods. On the other hand, many of them must also import food to feed their increasing populations, particularly in urban areas.
5. The problem is not going to disappear with current rates of economic growth. Even where rising demand is being slowly satisfied, which is generally the case, large numbers of poor and hungry people remain.
6. In Africa, which accounts for 26 out of the 36 countries classified as least developed by the United Nations, the situation is getting worse: per capita food production actually fell about 10 per cent in a decade and several countries were unable to increase imports enough to offset the decline. Africa has not only had to cope with a population increasing more rapidly than any other developing region; but also sustained production is made difficult by poor soils and a difficult climate - for example, drought has ravaged the continent almost continuously since the early 1970s. The region is particularly dependent on agricultural commodities for its exports, while the "green revolution" has had much less impact in Africa than, for example, in Asia.

Food production and distribution

7. Solving current food problems depends on two main factors: sustained increases in food production and more equitable access to food supplies.

8. World supplies of dietary energy are now about 10 per cent more than the nutritional requirements of the population. Even the supplies available in the developing countries would be nearly sufficient to meet domestic needs, if they were distributed strictly in accordance with these requirements. In fact, to a large extent, levels of income determine how food is distributed among the population. Thus some people, particularly in industrialized countries, consume more than their nutritional requirements, and many people, especially in developing countries, consume less.

9. Redistribution sufficient to eliminate hunger and malnutrition would entail massive reapportionment of income and natural resources both among and within countries - not necessarily a feasible undertaking. However, available food supplies can be redistributed through such measures as food aid, supplementary feeding programmes, selective subsidies, and low-price shops.

10. Therefore, the amounts of food produced must be increased, and significantly. A 4 per cent target for average yearly increases in the developing countries' food and agricultural production has been called for often: in 1970, in the International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade; in 1974, by the World Food Conference; in 1980, by the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade.

11. That goal remains widely unrealized. In the 10 years which have followed the World Food Conference of 1974, world food production increased annually by 2.2 per cent. With the exception of Asia and the Far East, the majority of developing regions have failed to achieve the minimum indicative goals of food production increases discussed by the World Food Conference. In 52 countries, representing 476 million people, food production did not keep pace with population growth.

12. However, the successes achieved also deserve notice. China, for example, has exceeded the food production goal. India has recently achieved self-sufficiency in cereals. Indonesia has eliminated its rice deficit.

13. By building their agricultural self-reliance, the developing countries can lessen their dependence on increasing food imports.

14. Efforts to increase food production also make it possible to involve far more people in food marketing processes. New jobs can be created in the rural sector.

15. FAO's study Agriculture: Toward 2000 indicates that the needed production increases are possible. They will, however, require increased financing.

16. The level of assistance to agriculture in 1983 at constant 1975 prices represented less than two thirds of the internationally-agreed estimate of annual requirements of \$8,300 million at 1975 prices for the period 1975-1980. This was also only 42 per cent of the estimated requirements of \$12,500 million (at 1975 prices) for 1990 as projected in the FAO study Agriculture: Toward 2000.

17. Although the level of the assistance required might appear overwhelming, it is miniscule when compared to military spending which in 1984 was estimated at nearly \$970 billion.

An agenda for the developing world

18. In order for the developing nations to expand their agricultural production as rapidly as they must, investments will be needed to expand and improve irrigation. While agricultural areas can still be extended without ecological damage in some areas, most of the growth in production must come from higher yields on land already in use. Agriculture must make much more use of chemical and organic fertilizers, improved seeds, and pesticides. Mechanization must be encouraged judiciously, where it will raise production and create off-farm employment.

19. For increased agricultural production to succeed in lessening hunger and malnutrition, depends to a very large extent on how it is done. Not only is people's participation in the institutions and systems which govern them a basic human right, but "Rural development strategies can realize their full potential only through the motivation, active involvement and organization at the grass-roots level of rural people, with special emphasis on the least advantaged". ^{1/} Many people who have until now been excluded - women, landless labourers, small farmers and fishers - must become deeply involved in the work and in the direction of the development process.

20. Government agricultural services, including research, education, extension, marketing and credit, must be reoriented to meet the needs of small producers. In many countries, agrarian reform would enable the rural poor to have access to and control over land and other productive resources. People's organizations through which rural people participate in development, should be encouraged and supported.

21. Reducing huge but avoidable food losses can greatly expand the available supplies. In 1977, the FAO Conference established an Action Programme for the Prevention of Food Losses which concentrates on basic foodstuffs in the farm and village. This can mean more food for the rural poor, by conserving supplies, including the large part that never enters the market. More efficient marketing and processing would also help resolve the dilemma of how to encourage producers without increasing prices to consumers too much.

The involvement of the industrialized world

22. Industrialized countries should give direct support to the efforts made by developing countries, and indirect support through the creation of an improved structure of international relations. Many needed changes were proposed in the Declaration and Programme of Action of a New International Economic Order, adopted by the Sixth Special Session of the General Assembly in 1974. Unfortunately, progress toward implementation of these changes has been extremely slow.

^{1/} Report of the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD), Programme of Action III, p. 8.

23. Most industrialized countries have not reached targets for resource flows. Only a few of the smaller industrialized countries have contributed 0.7 per cent of their GNP to official development assistance, meeting the long-standing international target.

24. Since 1974 the international community has accelerated its resource commitments and disbursements to the food and agriculture sector in response to the consensus achieved at the World Food Conference. None the less, the magnitude of resource flows, bilateral as well as multilateral, has remained short of widely acknowledged resource needs. In addition, ODA concessional commitments for food and agriculture declined in 1983 with a consequential effect on disbursements in the near future.

Providing and co-ordinating external aid

25. The largest single source of capital assistance for food and agriculture and for rural development is the World Bank. In recent years it has greatly increased its emphasis on these sectors, setting an example which other sources of assistance should follow.

26. FAO, through its Investment Centre, works closely with the World Bank and other external lending institutions, such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the African, Asian and Inter-American development banks in the identification and preparation of investment projects, while also providing technical assistance. In 1984, projects worth more than \$2.3 billion for agricultural development in the Third World, particularly Africa, were generated by the Investment Centre.

27. Voluntary aid by non-governmental organizations has played an important part in meeting needs not covered by official assistance. Its flexibility and its ability to work closely with people's organizations make it an effective and creative type of assistance. The promotion of such voluntary efforts must be encouraged.

The role of trade

28. A large part of the export earnings of many developing countries still comes from food and other agricultural, fishery and forestry products.

29. Developing countries continue to encounter blocks to increasing their agricultural export earnings. These include protectionist measures by industrialized countries - their main markets - competition with synthetic substitutes, limited market access in the industrialized centrally planned economies. Their earnings are also highly unstable from year to year. Intergovernmental discussions and negotiations have considered these matters at length, for example in the successive rounds of multilateral Trade Negotiations under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, in the negotiations concerning UNCTAD's Integrated Programme for Commodities and a Common Fund to finance it, and in FAO's Intergovernmental Commodity Study Groups. Progress has generally been slow. Many attempts have been made to adopt and operate international agreements between importing and exporting countries for individual commodities. Few have been agreed, even fewer have lasted very long, and the economic provisions of some have remained inoperative for long periods.

30. Industrialized countries need to make a number of adjustments in order to absorb the potential export surpluses of the developing countries. While adding appreciably to the export earnings of the developing countries, reductions in protection would, in turn, substantially expand their demand for the industrialized countries' exports. Such policies would also benefit consumers in the industrialized countries through lower prices.

Food aid

31. Since the early 1950s, food aid has helped meet emergencies and supported nutritional programmes, food for work and development projects.

32. In 1974, the World Food Conference set a minimum target of food aid of 10 million tons of cereals a year (about 0.6 per cent of annual world production). Since then, progress achieved has been mixed.

33. A number of positive advances have been achieved. Over the decade, total food aid has increased significantly in real terms above the low level to which it had fallen in 1974. A new Food Aid Convention (FAC) was concluded in 1980 and extended in 1983 with a guaranteed minimum level of food aid of 7.6 million tons of grains, substantially higher than under the earlier FAC. The International Emergency Food Reserve (IEFR) of 500,000 tons of cereals a year, called for by the Seventh Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly, has become operational, and exceeded the target for its resources in 1981, 1983, 1984 and 1985.

34. Despite those significant advances, several shortcomings remain. The minimum annual food aid target of 10 million tons of grain established by the Conference has been attained only in the year July 1984-June 1985 as a result of the response to the exceptional food aid requirements of African countries facing severe food shortages. Forward planning of food aid on a multi-annual basis has been undertaken by only a small number of donors and on a limited scale. The ability of low-income countries to purchase their food import requirements on commercial terms has decreased.

World food security

35. The contrast between Africa battling against famine and richer nations struggling with surpluses throws into high profile the importance of world food security: all people at all times should have both physical and economic access to the basic food they need.

36. During the past decade, the notion of food security has been extended, reflecting shifts in perception of the world food problem as a whole. During the world food crisis of the early 1970s, international concern about improving world food security focused on measures to reduce price and supply instability in world markets. The World Food Conference in 1974 and the 1979 FAO Plan of Action on World Food Security therefore sought to ensure availability of food supplies in the event of widespread crop failure. Measures to alleviate instability in world cereal markets remains a priority for achieving world food security. However, these measures are not considered adequate to combat hunger in developing countries which is of a chronic rather than a temporary nature.

37. The FAO Committee on World Food Security therefore adopted in 1983 a revised concept of world food security which has since received widespread support by the international community. According to this concept, food security should have three specific aims: (a) increasing food production; (b) maximizing stability in food supplies and markets; and (c) ensuring access to supplies on the part of those who need them.

38. Many low-income food-deficit countries need to develop national preparedness programmes to cope with crop fluctuations and food disasters. These programmes should include an early warning system to give advance indications of potential crop failures. They should also contain a set of measures and procedures ready to be introduced in the event of serious crop failures, including emergency import programmes; identification of food reserves to be drawn upon until additional supplies arrive; and standby disaster units. Regional workshops on these issues have already been organized by FAO for the Asia and Pacific Region and for Africa.

39. FAO established its Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture on the recommendations of the 1974 World Food Conference. Its main objectives are to give a warning of impending changes in world food conditions, and to enhance the capacity of Governments and international organizations to take prompt and appropriate action to deal with emerging food shortages. FAO has also assisted in the establishment of national early warning systems in several countries, and regional groupings such as the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference.

40. The FAO Committee on World Food Security at its April 1984 session considered several specific proposals for action at national, regional and global levels for implementing the revised concept of world food security. It supported an interim system of national food reserves under which developed countries and others in a position to do so would earmark grain or funds for meeting the urgent import requirements of low-income food-deficit countries.

41. At its April 1985 session, the Committee considered the text of a World Food Security Compact which it had asked the Director-General to prepare. The Compact is intended to consolidate what has already been agreed upon in various fora concerning world food security. The Council and the Conference of FAO will now examine the document at their forthcoming sessions in 1985.

42. In the last 10 years and since the World Food Conference, some aspects of world food security have been improved. But much remains to be done. Food security problems will remain central in FAO's work and the Organization will continue to explore all possible approaches until the poorest and neediest of the world have dependable access to their basic food.

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Concluding remarks

43. Malnutrition, hunger and famine will continue to afflict human societies, and will grow worse, unless there is an informed and continuing attack on their causes and their effects. Agriculture must become a first priority in the developing world. Wherever absolute poverty exists it must be eliminated. Justice and peace cannot co-exist with widespread hunger.

44. The struggle to end hunger will take many resources, and consistent effort. As a leader of those efforts FAO has worked to eradicate hunger and to bring decent living conditions to rural people. In spite of its limited resources - FAO's entire budget from its inception to the present day amounts to about one-half of the cost of a nuclear submarine - it will continue to battle the problem of food on all fronts, in partnership with national Governments and the international community.

Note on the activities of FAO's Legal Office with particular
reference to the implementation of the right to food

45. Where the right to food of adequate quality is concerned, a consolidation has been going forward in all industrialized countries, and in an increasing number of developing countries, of the provisions of food law dealing with the production, handling, preservation, transport and inspection aspects. The primary objective here is to protect the consumer, particularly where his health may be affected, and to secure fair trading. Practically all modern enactments having to do with food are evidence that consumer health protection is in the forefront of the legislator's concerns. In addition, modern food legislation, harmonized with that of the most advanced nations in this field and duly enforced, is often seen as an efficacious means of boosting a developing country's food exports.

46. In this context, a special place belongs to the Joint FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission. The work of this body, with its - albeit indirect - influence on positive law, is producing concrete results. The progressive unification of technical standards and the harmonization of national rules are gradually removing technical obstacles affecting international trade in food. Despite the numerous technical and legal difficulties that this process entails, there is a distinct tendency towards homogeneity among various countries' food laws. This tendency redounds to the benefit of both the producer, who thus has access to wider markets, and the consumer, who is offered a wider choice of food items at prices within his reach.

47. With respect to food law, FAO has brought its efforts to bear on international harmonization, to this end developing and disseminating recommended standards, codes of practice, etc. It has promoted the adoption of laws providing for an effective food control without the need for top-heavy administrative arrangements, and for turning human and economic resources to good account.

48. In the context of those objectives, FAO collects and disseminates information in legislation. It maintains a central data bank consisting at present of approximately 125,000 legislative texts, indexed by subject and by country, responds to requests by Governments for legislative information and issues publications, including a semi-annual periodical Food and Agricultural Legislation.

49. FAO assembles and researches legislative documentation providing Member Nations with a basis for formulating their own laws in terms of a homogeneous and co-ordinated body of principles and in a way allowing social, economic, scientific and technological developments affecting food to be taken into account. In this way the resulting legislation will guarantee supplies of food that will be harmless and wholesome for both the home and export markets.

50. In this connection several Legislative Studies have been published on such subjects as food for infants and small children, and international trade in bovine meat. FAO is also making a study of joint ventures in the food sector and on the advantages to be expected from this novel formula for channelling capital, for technology transfer and longer-term contracts offering more stable arrangements for the producer.

51. Assistance and information has also been provided on food-related subjects: legislation on water - including the uses of this resource for irrigation - land use planning and the expansion of the land area under agriculture. All these matters have a direct or indirect bearing on food production; and the overall objective is to ensure the availability of the largest number of food items to all sectors of the population in FAO Member Nations and, at the same time, to restrain unfair trading at national and international levels whenever such practices redound to the detriment of the consumer or create obstacles to international commerce.

52. Finally, FAO maintains contacts and collaborates with the Commission on Human Rights of the United Nations and other bodies concerned with the drafting of international instruments relating to the right to food.